

Silence Speaks in the Workplace: Uncovering the Experiences of LGBT Employees in Turkey

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1 Introduction

Today, employees with diverse backgrounds and unique characteristics who are often associated with major sources of change, creativity and innovation (Frohman 1997) may potentially provide invaluable contributions to their organizations. However, they might also be subject to unfair, unequal treatment and discriminatory behavior in the workplace due to their minority status. In the given circumstances, these employees feel compelled to remain silent in the face of various concerns and issues. The notion, conceptualized as “organizational silence” in the literature, is likely to pose a serious challenge to the development of the pluralistic organization that appreciates differences among employees and encourages the expression of multiple ideas and thoughts (Morrison and Milliken 2000).

Minority groups are, indeed, more likely to be vulnerable to being silenced by the rest of the organizational members who hold the majority and power in organizations. Among minority groups in organizations, LGBT employees are the most silenced and the least studied subjects, particularly within the Turkish work context. In a study focused on voice, silence and diversity, Bell et al. (2011) described LGBT employees as invisible minorities who provide valuable focal points that can be used to examine employee voice mechanisms. They examined

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the negative consequences of LGBT silence in the workplace and discussed the ways their voices might be heard. Bowen and Blackmon (2003) also argued that the fear and threat of isolation are particularly powerful for members of sexual minorities.

Previous research on organizational silence conducted by Morrison and Milliken (2000) and Pinder and Harlos (2001) was built on the assumption of the heterosexual work environment without an adequate emphasis on the availability of non-heterosexual employees. Only Bowen and Blackmon (2003) focused on the dynamics of silencing sexual minorities at work by using “spiral of silence”, as proposed by Noelle-Neumann (1974). Hence, this chapter aims to unveil the major factors leading to LGBT silencing in the workplace, considering the paucity of research directly investigating employee silence from the viewpoint of LGBT individuals based on their unique experiences and own stories.

Given the fact that the literature on LGBT studies is predominantly based on Anglo-Saxon contexts, there are calls for further research (Priola et al. 2014; Tatli and Özbilgin 2011; Syed and Ozbilgin 2009) to explore under-represented territories to compare and contrast the existing findings, mostly generated by the USA and UK with different contexts, and this chapter sheds some light on silencing at work from the viewpoint of LGBT individuals, being one of the most under-researched minority groups in Turkey. Thus, the chapter contributes to both fields of diversity management and organizational silence by highlighting the voices of LGBT people in order to be heard in the scholarly arena. It represents one of the few empirical studies to challenge the silence around LGBT workers’ experiences in Turkey.

2 Relevant Literature and Previous Research Evidence

The fear and anxiety against differences in the socio-psychological sense and the discourse of “unlike us” portray “others” as a potential target through biases and stereotypes. As evidence of this situation, widespread discrimination against LGBT employees has been well documented in various academic publications (Barclay and Scott 2006; Day and Schoenrade 2000; Croteau 1996; Ragsin and Cornwell 2001; Fassinger 2008). Bowen and Blackmon (2003) addressed the issue of self-disclosure of sexual minorities at work, and how LGB employees are silenced by the organizational dynamics within the framework of the theory of spirals of silence based on Noelle-Neumann (1974). Spiral of silence is defined as a process experienced by an individual when he/she realizes that there is a lack of public support for the idea that he/she has been defending (Noelle-Neumann 1974, p. 44). Those who are willing to express their own ideas are obliged to self-censor based on the fear of isolation. Accordingly, employees are more likely to tell a lie or choose to remain silent given the lack of support from their work colleagues or perceived resistance

against raising different voices. In other words, people avoid raising their voices openly and honestly due to the threat and fear of isolation. This spiral of silence eventually limits constructive discussions for organizational change and development.

Bowen and Blackmon (2003) focused on fear and the threat of isolation that hinder LGB employees from coming out and publicly acknowledging their sexual orientation. Brinsfield (2009) indicated that employees tend to remain silent in the workplace due to the fear of retaliation. Ryan and Oestreich (1998) highlighted in their study that even though employees themselves are self-confident, they hold the view that speaking up might pose a risk for them (Premeaux and Bedeian 2003). Moreover, Detert and Edmondson (2006) pointed out that silence caused by fear influences not only employees at the lower level but also those at the middle and senior levels. The lack of legal protection in some national contexts, the relative lack of organizational equality policies and trade union support, the widespread negative attitudes toward homosexuality and the deeply rooted heterosexist culture in organizations may result in more silence for LGBT employees than for other minorities (Bell et al. 2011, p. 139) and exacerbate the climate of silence (Priola et al. 2014, p. 2). As an example, LGBT people in Turkey are still in jeopardy each time they want to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity due to overt hostility towards them, which is a powerful indicator of the first-wave research agenda where blatant abuse of LGBT workers forms the central issue in question (Colgan and Rumens 2015; Ozturk 2011). For instance, transwomen in Turkey are subject to violence and discrimination by the state apparatus as well as by society at large and they have severe difficulties in securing jobs, other than becoming a sex worker (Szulc 2011).

In previous literature, the issue of silence points out that employees are silenced based on the fear of not being able to gain promotion or losing their jobs (Morrison and Milliken 2003; Milliken et al. 2003; Detert and Edmondson 2008; Dutton et al. 2002). For example, Woods and Harbeck (1992) conducted in-depth phenomenological research of twelve lesbian physical education tutors' work experiences in relation to their identities as lesbians and teachers. All respondents in this research indicated that they would lose their jobs if their sexual orientation was revealed, and that female physical education teachers are negatively stereotyped as being lesbian. They frequently engaged in identity management strategies designed to conceal their lesbianism, such as passing as a heterosexual, self-distancing from others at school, and self-distancing from issues pertaining to homosexuality.

The disclosure of one's sexual orientation is a critical decision and a cumbersome process for sexual minorities in the workplace which eventually brings both positive and negative consequences (Chrobot-Mason et al. 2001; Ozeren 2014). Woods and Lucas (1993) argued in their book, *The Corporate Closet*, that gay individuals mainly adopt three different strategies to manage their gay identity in their professional working life, which are, counterfeiting, avoiding and integrating. In the counterfeiting strategy, an individual creates a fictitious heterosexual identity for himself/herself; in the avoiding strategy the individual tends to avoid sharing any personal information consciously; and lastly, in the integrating strategy the

individual discloses his/her sexual identity and manages the consequences of their decision. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that this type of separation in managing one's sexual identity does not seem to be relevant for transgender employees since concealing gender identity for them is almost impossible (Barclay and Scott 2006; Chrobot-Mason et al. 2001). They have specific and unique concerns and issues with respect to their career development during the transition process, and organizations cannot adequately address how to deal with transgender employees undergoing a transition in the workplace (Davis 2009).

In their study of discrimination experienced by lesbian employees, Levine and Leonard (1984) made a crucial distinction between formal and informal discrimination in the workplace. Formal discrimination refers to firing or not hiring someone due to their sexual minority status, being passed over for promotion and raises and being excluded from benefits, such as partner benefits and family leave. Besides, lesbian employees felt negative discrimination during the hiring process and currently employed lesbian employees are forced to resign or leave their jobs. On the other hand, informal discrimination consists of behaviors such as harassment, loss of credibility and lack of acceptance and respect by co-workers and supervisors (Bell et al. 2011; Croteau 1996).

It has widely been argued in the literature that the presence of LGBT friendly workplace policies, perceived organizational support, the possible treatment of work colleagues towards LGBT employees when they are out at work certainly influences the disclosure or non-disclosure decision of sexual minorities (Griffith and Hebl 2002; Bowen and Blackmon 2003; Huffman et al. 2008). Also, Chrobot-Mason et al. (2001) indicated that a supportive organizational climate has an impact on the coming out of sexual minorities. Bowen and Blackmon (2003) claim that if LGB employees feel they are not supported by their colleagues, they will not be able to openly raise their voices. In other words, if LGB employees do not feel they are safe regarding support from their heterosexual colleagues or think there is possible resistance to their voices, they remain either silent or tend to show fake reactions. The latter tactic brings some psychological costs, for pretending to be heterosexual generates tremendous anxiety over possible sanctions as well as severe strain from pretending to be what they are not.

3 Methodology

A qualitative research method was adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of the silencing of LGBT employees in the workplace. The exploratory design was employed in particular since the notion of employee silence has not been subject to investigation before from the perspective of sexual and transgender minorities in Turkey, therefore, the current study can be considered as a preliminary attempt for subsequent researches in this field.

In order to gain greater and more exploratory insights into the research topic, the method of focus group discussions was found to be the most appropriate and useful

way to obtain qualitative data that provide detailed descriptions of experiences/beliefs and different views of the participants (Morrison-Beedy et al. 2001). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest four criteria for establishing trustworthiness of focus group data: credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability. For this study, to establish the trustworthiness of the focus group data by addressing these four criteria, the techniques suggested by Morrison-Beedy et al. (2001) and Shenton (2004) were also used. Two focus group discussions were conducted, each with five participants, to gather the full range of views and experiences with regard to how they are silenced at work, which forms of silence are the most influential, their sexual identity management strategies, and overall perceptions on equality and inclusiveness in their current or previously employed organizations. Each group session was carried out with a moderator (the first author). Focus groups were conducted at the venue of the Black Pink Triangle Association in Izmir on July 9th, 2014. A moderator guide was developed comprising focus group ground rules and primary open-ended questions. Each focus group discussion took two and half hours, resulting in five hours of tape recording which formed the database for this study.

Data in the study were analyzed via the descriptive/interpretative and inductive approaches used in qualitative research (Marshall and Rossman 2006). Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts of the audiotapes were proofread and corrected. Each transcript was repeatedly read to enable complete familiarity with, and immersion in, the data. The next stage was to code and analyze the participants' statements using narrative, interpretative and deconstructive analytical techniques, and then discuss the codes for each group to arrive at meaningful themes. The same process was used for each focus group and then across the groups to detect the commonalities and salient patterns across the data. As a result, the major themes of LGBT silence at work were identified.

Research on LGBT issues is a sensitive area of research in Turkey and the "hidden" nature of the LGBT population in organizations raises a number of methodological issues. In order to overcome these challenges, LGBT participants were reached and recruited via the fifth largest civil society organization on the LGBT movement in Turkey, which is the Black Pink Triangle Association in Izmir. A number of access routes were used to contact LGBT employees including e-mails, internet sites, invitations via social media and word of mouth. Thus, snowballing sampling was employed to ask each LGBT respondent whether he/she could bring a friend from the same community to the focus group discussion. Since the visibility of the LGBT population is a major concern in Turkey, only ten participants were reached and they were split into two different focus groups. Both discussions were conducted on the same day (July 9th, 2014) at the same venue; the first one started at 14:00H and the second at 17:30H. This is, in itself, an interesting research finding and illustrates the hidden nature of much of the LGBT population even in the city of Izmir that is often called "the most modernized and westernized part" of Turkey. In order to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, pseudonyms were used throughout. The demographic profiles of participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Participants' profiles in focus group interviews

Pseudonyms	Participants' demographic information							Sex and gender identity
	Age	Education	Total work experience (years)	Work experience in the current org. (years)	Occupation	Position in the current organization	Sexual orientation	
Ali	30	Bachelor (currently a Master's student)	5	3	Musicology	Project expert and LGBT activist	Gay	Male/Cisgender
Kemal	32	High school	4	3	Employee in a civil society organization	Project coordinator	Gay	Male/Cisgender
Mustafa	26	Bachelor	3	Unemployed	Art assistant	None	Gay	Male/Cisgender
Manolya	32	Vocational school	12	3	Sex worker	Human rights and trans activist	-	Trans-woman
Arda	30	Bachelor (currently a Master's student)	10	0	Assistant director	Working freelance in movie production sector	Gay	Male/Cisgender
Sevgi	35	Bachelor	16	12	Radiology technician in a hospital	In charge of radiology unit in a hospital	Lesbian/Bisexual	Woman/Cisgender
Feride	24	High school	3 months	3 months	Sex worker	Sex worker	-	Trans-woman
Deniz	25	Bachelor	1	1	-	Customer representative in a maritime firm	Queer	Queer
Nazan	23	Bachelor	3	1	-	Responsible for administrative affairs in a university dormitory	Lesbian	Woman/Cisgender
Can	22	Bachelor	3	1	Salesperson	Employee in a book store	Gay	Male/Cisgender

4 Findings

This section focuses on emerging themes from the research on LGBT people at work in Turkey from the viewpoint of employee silence. Three major dimensions of employee silence (defensive, acquiescent, and pro-social) were found as being relevant and meaningful in explaining how LGBT individuals are silenced at work. Thematic findings are presented below along with the salient statements of the participants, based on the focus group interviews.

4.1 *Defensive Silence*

Participants are inclined to exhibit silence as an intentional, conscious and proactive behavior in various ways in order to cope with the fear of losing their job, position or status. The participants underlined that they found various kinds of jokes and implicit remarks in the workplace so stressful and psychologically painful that they sometimes have to remain silent due to a fear of being an object of derision and being stigmatized at work. This form of silence adopted by the participants is called a “defensive silence” that includes withholding relevant thoughts, information or ideas for the purpose of self-protection based on the fear of negative labeling and exposure to social isolation. For the purpose of this study, it was preferred to use the label “defensive silence” rather than “quiescent silence” to avoid any possible confusion with the several other meanings of quiescence (such as compliance or agreement) in line with Van Dyne et al. (2003).

A friend of mine is a transwoman who is currently working as a hostess in an airline company. She entered this job by declaring that she is a biological woman. Actually, she physically looks like a biological woman. She believes that if her “real” identity is understood by others, especially by the employer, she will be dismissed immediately. Her company does not know anything about her past life at all. . . . I think that a transwoman can be employed in a public sector with a woman’s identity rather than her transwoman identity. (Arda)

I have been the subject of derogatory remarks and jokes because they were questioning me whether I had a girlfriend or not. Since I didn’t have a girlfriend for one and half years, they were teasing me, such as “are you a faggot?” (Can)

We were discussing an issue, should LGB individuals come out, unlike heterosexuals? This is not a personal choice for us. Indeed, in working life you (let’s say as a LGB person) don’t generally have the chance of coming out with your real identity. Theoretically, you may come out. But practically once you are out at work, you are likely to be dismissed, subject to discrimination or you are forced to resign. (Deniz)

A lesbian physician chooses to remain silent about her sexual orientation because she thinks that her lesbian identity poses a significant risk or threat to her career if she reveals her true identity in the workplace. As can be seen from the participant statements below, LGBT individuals have a fear of negative labeling and exposure to social isolation.

I keep myself secret at work; nobody except a few friends knows my lesbian identity. You know, as you might guess, there there's a lot of gossip and tittle-tattle in the hospitals. I am not "out" at work because of my position as I don't want everyone to talk about my sexual identity. I know some of my gay friends in the hospital who experience problems at work due to their sexual orientation. (Sevgi)

There is a lot of gossip about me at work because of my transgender identity. I was working at a bar of the hotel and became successful in selling drinks to customers. Then the other employees started gossiping, as in, I am absolutely having sex with other men so that I receive great tips. In fact, I didn't have a sexual relationship with anyone during my working experience in this hotel. Because I knew that, although I didn't participate in this kind of behavior, they were talking behind me as if I did. If I really had had sex with someone in the hotel, I couldn't imagine what they would say about me? (Manolya)

In some cases LGB participants are silenced since they have a fear of becoming a target if they expressed their sexual orientation once they are out in the workplace.

I believe that if there were conflict with my boss or colleagues at work, they would use my sexual orientation against me and make some implicit remarks about my sexuality. Assume a heterosexual did exactly the same thing with me, for example, he made a mistake, and in this case, the straight guy wouldn't be subject to a conversation about his sexuality. So why am I? How would I overcome such arguments related to my sexual orientation? Therefore, many LGBT people generally have to remain silent and closeted. (Mustafa)

One of the reasons why participants are silenced is due to their fear of being unable to be promoted. As can be seen from the following quotation, a gay male participant expresses his deep concerns and worries related to his promotion decision. He thinks that although he deserved to get this promotion, he was precluded due to his sexual orientation.

I remained closeted in my former workplace. However, something was still understood. I worked there for one and half years. During this time, I didn't have any girlfriends and this situation was found very strange by the others. . . There was a vacant position in warehouse administration. A woman secretary had left the job. They recruited a new person for this position. Usually when a new position arose, they tried to fill this position from within the company first. But this time they preferred a new job candidate from outside. For instance, I had enough relevant experience, and did the internship as well as the secretary, but they didn't choose me. I know that the real reason was my sexual orientation. (Can)

The statement below shows how a lesbian physician is worried about being perceived as a "threat" by her heterosexual colleagues working in the same hospital. In line with this situation, she is constantly trying to regulate and control her own behavior in order to avoid any possible "misunderstanding" in the eyes of her heterosexual counterparts.

When I have a short break while sitting in the hospital yard, if I look at a woman by chance for a few seconds or more, as everyone does, I have the feeling I am bothering her. I usually use the same dressing room with all the women physicians together and they don't know my lesbian identity, but I think to myself, do I disturb them or do they feel uncomfortable? I feel under pressure about doing something wrong or giving the wrong impression to my colleagues. Therefore, I always have a need to control myself. (Sevgi)

Based on several gay participants' statements, it is argued that gay males sometimes tend to adjust their behavior according to the context they are engaged

in. This situation can also be explained by the degree of self-monitoring whereby an individual observes, regulates and controls how well he or she is fulfilling the social expectations of his/her role within a particular context (Clair et al. 2005, p. 87; Snyder 1979). Accordingly, high self-monitors are likely to conform to societal expectations whereas low self-monitors are likely to emphasize self-expression in spite of those societal expectations. Especially for those with high self-monitoring, they are more likely to adapt and alter their behavior based on the context and/or societal expectations.

In my previous job, I was working in a coffee shop. I was not out at this job. I guess I pretended to be heterosexual. Nevertheless, I was sometimes unable to hide my gay identity. From my gestures, customers thought that I could be gay. Once, they did ask me whether I was a gay, I immediately refused to define myself as a gay. I replied saying, "what are you talking about?" Well, I think I was trying to conform myself to the prevailing circumstances and behave how they expect me to behave. (Kemal)

Finding a job as a homosexual person is so difficult that LGBT individuals have to mask their real identities, pretend to be heterosexual, and try to behave in a masculine way as if he is gay, otherwise he will suffer oppression. If he can conceal his identity (as much as he can), he will do so in order to survive in his employment. (Manolya)

A transwoman can still work but in line with the societal expectations. Our society accepts and labels us as sex workers as one of the very few professional options we are allowed to do. Almost all career paths are closed to transwomen other than becoming a sex worker. If you are lucky and you really have a good voice and if somebody is supporting you, perhaps you can become a singer in a third class night club (laughing). . . There are just a few exceptions: celebrities such as Bülent Ersoy in Turkey. Ironically, she never identifies herself as a transwoman, instead, just a woman. However, for "normal" jobs, as you can understand, such as a teacher, doctor, lawyer, it is almost impossible to see a transwoman. (Manolya)

Conversely, some participants disagree with the idea or implicit assumption about themselves to behave necessarily in line with the societal expectations. Those individuals who adopt "integrating" or "accepting self" as an identity management strategy reveal their sexual identity status at work and manage the consequences of this decision. People with high self-esteem and low self-monitoring tend to accept their sexual minority status which entails embracing their identity openly in ways that make it clear to others (Griffin 1992; Woods and Lucas 1993).

I don't need to conceal my sexual identity. . . I am myself and a gay man as you can see. . . I really don't care whether I should look more masculine or behave like a heterosexual man. People around me should accept my existence as a gay man. (Mustafa)

Several participants exert extra effort to separate their work and life domains as an avoidance strategy to manage their sexual minority status at work. This involves actively eluding any references to personal information and maintaining strong boundaries between personal and business lives (Woods and Lucas 1993). In these cases, employees tend to create LGB friendly spaces in their private lives whereas they conform to heteronormativity in the workplace. They engage in silence about their sexual orientation in order not to face any discriminatory and repressive treatment they are most likely to experience at work. The evidence of these fictitious lives, also addressed by a lesbian participant below, is consistent with

Levine and Leonard (1984, p. 702) who argued that most lesbian employees tend to cope with discrimination by living a dual life; at work they “pass for heterosexual, complete with imaginary boyfriends and during evenings and weekends with homosexual friends, they let their hair down.”

I am living a dual life, in the hospital and outside the hospital. I have a social life outside but I never bring my work colleagues to my social space where I spend some time with my homosexual friends. (Sevgi)

In another example, a gay salesman adopts avoidance as an identity management strategy, such as maintaining a quiet and reserved demeanor in the presence of heterosexuals and being exposed to degrading, homophobic remarks by colleagues without saying anything. Participants who use these strategies opted not to lie or fight back but simply suffer in silence and be invisible (Della et al. 2002, p. 381).

I am currently working as a salesman in a bookstore. When a LGBT customer comes to our store, my colleagues, who don't know I am a gay man, point and say to me, “hahaha. . . look at that guy!” and start making fun of him. (Can)

One of my friends came to the hospital for an examination and I took him to a doctor who is also my friend. The doctor soon turned and asked me “where do you know this guy from, he is gay, what are you doing with him?” Then, in the same examination room, there were also other doctors. Once my friend (patient) entered this room, there were five doctors, each of them was the head of their own division, and they stared at him, and it was so disturbing. . . I am sure that after we left this room, they began to chat about my friend for a long time. (Sevgi)

I can personally say why are we always expecting homosexuals to come out at work unlike heterosexuals do? For example, do heterosexual employees come out saying “we are heterosexuals.” I prefer not to disclose my sexual identity at work. (Arda)

Male dominated workplaces are also likely to increase perceived discrimination, as experienced by the participants. Several difficulties were observed for the gay participants in being open about their sexual identities in hostile and, especially, male dominated work settings. In the eyes of their heterosexual colleagues, their differences and outsider status are constantly asserted and reinforced by comments about their appearance, bodies and physical difference (Wright 2013).

The cinema industry is really male dominated. There are a few women working in this sector. Especially, the work being done depends on physical strength. Under these circumstances, we were very marginalized as we were perceived as “skinny”, “weak” and “homo”. (Mustafa)

The field of theatre is also so masculine. Most men in the theatre with whom I worked made me feel like I potentially had a sexual desire towards all of them, which was so disgusting. . . It was such a male dominated arena that swearing, using bad, masculine words were highly common without considering the presence of women on the scene. Actually, women in this sector were accustomed to such words and they were calling themselves, for example, “where is this fucking bitch, does she know what time it is now? . . .” Under these circumstances, I tried to put forward my masculine qualities as well. (Kemal)

Similarly, the participants exert significant effort to “fit in” with the heterosexual norms imposed by male dominated workplaces. The acceptance of LGBT people in such hostile work settings is closely related to what extent they are able to conform

to heteronormativity permeating the organization. Thus, the self-presentation at work through dress, appearance, gestures, posture, tone of voice and behavior is a major concern for the participants seeking to fit into this environment.

As long as you, as a gay man, do not constitute a “threat” to others, they can accept you waggishly. I mean “threat” as a gay person should not hit on someone in the workplace since it is usually unwelcome, unlike what heterosexual people do. It is so stressful even to think about a possibility of a gay man falling in love with someone in the workplace, especially male dominated ones. . . If you adapt yourself to living with the rules of such a heterosexist environment, they will accept you. They will probably say “we are very tolerant and not discriminating towards anyone as long as he (the gay person) conforms to our rules.” (Arda)

In my ex-workplace, they treated me like a heterosexual. To be honest, I also tried to conform to this situation since I had to spend all day with my colleagues. I didn’t want to create a conflict all the time, hence I simply pretended to be heterosexual. (Kemal)

In the workplace, as a homosexual person, you can normally discuss everything with your friends whom you are out, but for other people you should limit your conversation, and your discourses become restricted by the heteronormativity dominating the workplaces. (Nazan)

In several other cases, as described below, participants were silenced through social isolation by the group members and they were not allowed to participate in several group activities. Hence, they experienced a feeling of exclusion in the workplace, as well as a worry of decreasing social communication.

We were shooting a movie scene of rolling a car down the street and all the men were ready to push the car. I came towards them to participate but they said “look you, stop!” I stopped there for a while without saying anything. For me, it was a feeling of exclusion from my colleagues although we were all doing the same thing. They didn’t see me as a “real” man, psychically so strong and masculine in heterosexist terms, that they did not include me. It was a feeling of shame but I got used to it. (Arda)

I was previously acting in a theatre. In acting, physical contact is considered to be very important. However, neither female actresses nor male actors were willing to be closer to me while acting. I remember once, a woman actress had a fiancée. We were acting together. I learned one day her fiancé allowed her to act closely with me (such as “you can touch him as he is not actually a real man”), since I was perceived as “almost” a woman in his eyes. What shocked me just a few days later, her fiancé changed his mind as he learned that gay men have also masculine characteristics and they are “somewhat” men and he warned his fiancée to stay away from me. (Kemal)

I think that discrimination occurs on a more subtle level in terms of putting psychological pressure on the shoulders of homosexual employees who are out in the hospital, such as not being invited to a dinner, leaving them alone during lunch or not being able to communicate with them closely and easily. (Sevgi)

LGBT employees are particularly vulnerable to bullying and harassment at work and, hence, they can suffer from discrimination.

A friend of mine living in İzmir is a lesbian woman who works in a coffee shop. She was being harassed by her boss and she was working overtime and doing the most difficult tasks in her job. Whenever her homosexual friend came, she felt she was being watched by her boss as he was staring at her. She was really under great pressure and finally she had to resign from her job. (Mustafa)

In my previous workplace, I heard about a LGBT individual who used to work there before but it was a terrible experience for him because he was out. They made life

unbearable for him, such as tagging him with nicknames. In fact, he was bullied at work. (Can)

I also found it hard at a job in a resort hotel. At first I was sexually harassed by coworkers and almost all hotel employees at all levels (laughing. . .) When I complained to the general manager, they put me in a very distant place within the hotel, the bar, and it seemed that it was an isolated location. . . There were only three of us in our new location, but the other two guys were still watching and staring at me, which I found very irritating. As the time passed, I got used to my new location, especially, the hotel customers found me very interesting to talk to since I guess they were coming to the bar not only to have a drink but also to chat with me. . . I was selling more drinks than expected and the hotel administration was very happy. If I were a straight person, I am sure that customers wouldn't show such an interest. (Manolya)

4.2 *Acquiescent Silence*

Several participants hold the belief they will not be able to change anything by raising their ideas, concerns or any information related to their sexual orientation as they have already accepted their defeat against the status quo in the organization. They avoid expressing their views because they simply assume that they will not be able to create any difference in their organizations, even if they speak up. Under these circumstances, they feel a sense of resignation and adopt mainly a passive approach in the form of “employee acquiescence”.

I am really exhausted struggling with my boss and colleagues to change their ideas about my sexual identity. I know very well that whatever I say to them, it does not make any difference. I totally disengage and do not have any willingness to exert any effort to get involved in any discussions since I am aware of the fact that it never works. (Ali)

Well I think I am not motivated enough to come out at work. If I come out one day, my supervisor and some of my colleagues will absolutely judge me. No way out! I am sure. There are rules of the game you have to obey, whether you like or not. I have to accept. As far as I can see, there is no LGBT-friendly company in Turkey. Companies don't care about us. We are totally ignored not only by companies but also by trade unions. So I cannot rely on unions. Have you ever seen a LGBT member in a union in this country? If yes, I am sure very few exist. Frankly speaking, I am not Don Quixote as I cannot fight against these huge mental barriers. Silence is inevitable. (Deniz)

4.3 *Pro-Social Silence*

Individuals who adopt pro-social silence behavior withhold many ideas, information, or opinions with the goal of benefiting other people or the organization—based on altruism or cooperative motives (Van Dyne et al. 2003, p. 1368). Consistent with this view, the lesbian physician plays a partner role for her male colleague to protect him in a pro-social way in order for him to overcome the challenge of promotion.

One of my friends, who is a medical doctor, came to me one day and asked me to do a favor for him. He said that he was alone, single and needed a partner, a girlfriend, a fake one

(laughing)... I was kindly asked to become a fake girlfriend, actually his fiancée for a temporary period. He was gay but totally closeted. He thinks if his sexual orientation is understood by the senior professors in the department, the associate professorship for which he had already applied could be under great risk. I pretended to be his fiancée in the hospital. We continued this so-called fake relationship for 6 months due to his fear about the promotion, but then we gave up completely. (Sevgi)

5 Conclusion

This chapter reveals the daily workplace experiences of LGBT workers via focus group interviews drawn from a sample of ten participants in the city of Izmir, Turkey. It seeks to understand how LGBT people are silenced and in which ways they can manage and cope with their sexual and gender identities at work. Defensive silence due to fear and threat of isolation, acquiescent silence due to giving up hope of change, and pro-social silence due to withholding ideas in favor of other people or their own organization, were identified as the main emerging themes of silence based on the participants' accounts. Discussions took place about the various reasons behind their decisions to engage in silence at work, which are, the risk of being exposed to social isolation or exclusion, the fear of dismissal and career obstacles, as well as the fear of being an object of derision and stigmatized at work, bullying, prejudicial reactions and direct formal discrimination (e.g., job termination and not being able to gain promotion). In addition to the direct formal discrimination, there were also other ways to marginalize LGBT people in the workplace, for example, unwanted jokes and innuendos. "Silence" is one of these more subtle forms of discrimination experienced by the LGBT individuals in their everyday work activities. In line with Ozturk's (2011) study similarly carried out within the Turkish context, this chapter also illustrates that most LGB workers have to remain in the closet and very few of them are able to come out safely at work. This situation can be better explained by the heteronormativity permeating through the workplaces that still remain entrenched and largely unchallenged (Öztürk and Özbilgin 2015). A heteronormative culture of organizations may result in silencing of sexual minorities at work.

The major findings addressed in the chapter refer to the first wave of research in Turkey (overt forms of abuse directed at LGBT employees in situations in which legal and institutional protection is generally lacking) that seems contradictory considering the recent significant advances in a number of other countries which have reshaped the legislative landscape in terms of LGBT rights (Colgan and McKearney 2011, p. 625). In other words, sexual orientation and gender identity equality at work in Turkey continues to lag far behind the goals of the second research wave agenda (defined as: where LGBT employees have recognition in the public sphere and, as such, the research focuses on how effectively these rights are put into practice) (Ozturk 2011), as pursued by some EU member states, particularly the UK. The participant statements provide critical reflections that point out

the prevalent assumptions of hegemonic masculinity that is culturally embedded and strongly influences the perceptions of homosexuality in Turkey (Ertan 2008).

Consistent with this view, and with evidence put forward by this study, LGB individuals are likely to remain in the workforce as long as they conceal their true sexual orientation at work and even outside the workplace. In the case of transgender individuals, due to their visibility, they have to overcome the additional challenges derived from the heteronormative work environment, unlike their heterosexual or LGB colleagues. Most transgender people in Turkey remain outside the formal employment sphere and they are compelled to become sex workers to maintain their survival. The findings highlighted in this chapter potentially offer HR managers and organizational policymakers a greater awareness of the harmful effects of silencing LGBT employees on work outcomes, as well as several voice mechanisms; once they are applied to sexual and gender minorities, it may provide strategies for the inclusion of LGBT employees.

The main conclusion derived from this in-depth exploratory investigation based on the narratives of LGBT participants is as follows: the over-whelming cultural norms based on heteronormativity within Turkish society, the absence of legal protection, and the relative lack of organizational equality policies and trade union support contribute to silencing LGBT individuals at work. Thus, the effective way of tackling the sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination issue in Turkey urgently calls for holistic change in cultural norms, social institutions, and legal frameworks, as well as in organizational and trade union policies.

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